

Washington, DC – Today, U.S. Representatives Gwen Moore (D-Wis.), Barney Frank (D-Mass.), Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), Jared Polis (D-Colo.) and David Cicilline (D-R.I.) wrote to the Secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs to ensure that gays and lesbians discharged under “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” get the benefits they earned.

Late last year, President Obama signed legislation authorizing the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” These letters come at a crucial time in the repeal process as Secretary Gates has requested a plan – by tomorrow – that moves repeal forward and recommends Department policy changes.

The letters ask Secretaries Gates and Shinseki to address the issue of discharge characterizations in the repeal process. Some gay and lesbian service members discharged under “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” or previous policies were discharged in a way that may block access to health care for veterans, education through the GI Bill and other benefits.

Congresswoman Moore said, **“Even after we have ceremoniously repealed ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ we know there are still consequences. For some gays and lesbians the policy might as well have been – don’t ask, don’t tell, don’t provide veterans benefits they earned. We need to get rid of that silent part because we can’t leave anyone behind as our nation moves forward.”**

Congressman Frank said, **“While we cannot completely undo the injustice that has been done to gay and lesbian service members, we can at least diminish the harm they suffered by preserving the benefits they earned.”**

Congresswoman Baldwin said, **“It’s time to right a grievous wrong and fully recognize the military service of gay and lesbian Americans discharged under “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” One way of recognizing their service is to allow them the benefits they rightly earned. We cannot undo the injustice these former servicemembers have already suffered, but we can begin to serve them as honorably as they served our country.”**

Congressman Polis said, **“All the men and women who wear the uniform of this country**

deserve not only our deepest respect, but also our unwavering support regardless of whether they are straight or gay. Repealing DADT was an incredible victory for our nation and strengthens our armed forces, but the fight is not yet entirely over. As we fully implement the repeal of DADT, we must take action to ensure fair treatment for the many soldiers who, despite bravely serving our country, were discharged under this policy. They have earned it."

Congressman Cicilline said, **"While the discriminatory DADT policy has been repealed, there are still soldiers who may suffer from lack of benefits due to a former dishonorable discharge. The brave men and women defending our country abroad put their lives on the line so that we at home do not have to. These courageous servicemen and women deserve the benefits they rightly earned."**

Full text of the letters can be read here: [Letter to Secretary Gates](#) [Letter to Secretary Shinseki](#)

Also signing the letters were: Representatives John Yarmuth, Henry Waxman, Luis Gutierrez, Shelley Berkley, Pete Stark, Bobby Rush, Ed Markey, Anthony Weiner, Lois Capps, Mike Doyle, Betty McCollum, Betty Sutton, Barbara Lee, Edolphus Towns, Danny Davis, Maxine Waters, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Russ Carnahan, Chellie Pingree, Al Green, Gregory Meeks, Bob Filner, Jan Schakowsky, Keith Ellison, Jim Moran, Karen Bass, Donna Edwards, and John Lewis.

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